

POLICE AND MINORITIES:

Significance of the National Civil Rights Revolution

When I was caused to consider for the first time the topic that has been assigned to me, my thoughts turned almost immediately to a prophetic editorial by John Ciardi of the Saturday Review, printed in February 1961, and stating with great clarity that which represents the basic rationale for the spirit of revolt which is abroad in the land today:

"It is certain" said Mr. Ciardi, "that the Negro will not achieve his emancipation as the result of a debate on right and wrong. The Negro is discriminated against by a force of inbred prejudice. He will be freed only by a force of history greater than the force of prejudice. That force is now upon us all."

"The South (nor the North - Ed.) cannot be left to handle the issue at its own pleasure because it has no solution within itself, but only temporization and evasion. There can be no solution until the Negro has achieved full equality; and so long as the South remains nostalgic for the porticoes and crinolines of its own lost image of itself, it will not (of its own volition - Ed.) tolerate equality."

"The problem of the American Negro is no more local than the rockets that will descend upon us if we fail him in his human cause."

Within this succinct statement will be found a recognition of the many subtle as well as obvious facets of a domestic problem that has plagued us for many generations; one that is recognized as the No. 1 domestic problem today because there has been such little honest, intelligent, courageous confrontation of it in a spirit of free and analytical exchange as an approach to solution.

In order to make even an elementary approach to objective consideration of the many facets of this complex problem - "The Race Problem" as we are prone to call it - we should try to view it as:

1. An issue that is a direct and almost complete refutation of our value system and our professed code of national morality;
2. as one whose domestic history reveals a continuing downward spiral, a worsening condition, which is seldom examined in objective dialogue free from heavy emotional impact which beclouds reason;
3. as an issue that becomes more confused rather than clarified by semantics; by the language which has become part of the problem;
4. as an issue that inflicts upon society a tremendous burden of cost for which there is not a single justification, but for which the minority group victim is made responsible;
5. as a situation that has, in addition to its domestic ramifications, very deep and significant international implications.

"minority problem"
#2

But, let us review each of these briefly. Of the ten principles which have been enunciated by the National Education Association as representing the "American System of Values", the first and perhaps most prominently emphasized is the concept

DEC 6 1973

Free Public Library, Newark, N. J.
N. J. REFERENCE DIVISION - LD

of the importance of the individual human personality. Philosophically, we differ from totalitarian principles on this fundamental level; they believing that man is but an instrument of the state. This basic principle is under constant assault and daily repudiation in the American scene where practices of racial and religious discrimination and segregation prevail. Likewise, the principle of Common Consent is absent when entire groups of people, because of race, are denied both the right of franchise and that of equal opportunity for intellectual, spiritual and civic growth. Respect for Excellence, a 3d element, presupposes that the unhampered right to compete as an individual, is direct recognition of the validity of this concept in our culture, but we know that this right is denied with such frequency as to be the practice rather than the exception. So it is with each of the principles in our system of values; that which represents our moral stature as a people, that which supposedly represents our birthright of Freedom. Moral Responsibility, as a national principle is being put to a severe test today, as is Devotion to Truth, Moral Equality, Brotherhood, Pursuit of Happiness, other elements in our value system. Not only the reputation of America, but the soul of America, is under assault today as at no other time in our national history.

A second facet is represented in what I have termed the continuing downward spiral in relationships, revealed in our domestic history, because of an inability to address the problem through positive, objective communication. History's impact upon present day attitudes, if examined with logic and good will, indicates quite clearly that the political sins of inept leadership of the North, following the Civil War, countered by sins of reprisal by the proud, vanquished people of the South, reacted not upon each other, but upon the ignorant, frightened, confused persons in the game, the new black Freedmen; and that this ironic twist of vengeance has been imposed with increasing vigor and venom upon all succeeding generations of American Negroes in a form and with a purpose never before inflicted upon a people in world history.

As all-pervasive as has been the so-called Race Problem in America, there is no domestic situation as beclouded by myth, fallacy and fancy as is this situation. The appalling ignorance of the real issues existing on the majority or white side of the fence is a source of constant amazement to those who work professionally in the field and who, accordingly, must arm themselves with the facts. This is due, first of all, to the almost complete absence of communication until very recent years, between leadership elements in the two racial groups. That which has passed for communication, has been the exchange between the white employer and the black employee; the vertical communication in which the vassal discloses only that which is to his advantage, and the master discloses much more than he suspects. A second factor causing misinformation and confusion is the peculiar language of American race relations; the semantical roadblocks to understanding.

Two important words in the English language, "Time" and "Education" are over-worked in race-relations conversations. Rarely however, is either examined or defined in determining who does what within the passive framework of "Time", or how Education is to be applied, to whom and when, in seeking positive solutions to the problem. "Gradualism" is intended to imply sweet reason in determining a pace of change, but actually it is used to mean that one should not press even for the beginning of change, without any consideration for the question of pace. Then, too, we are reminded of the American worship of "Voluntary action", which of course is the opposite of having things "Pushed Down one's Throat". This really means that We - the Masters, must be left alone to move in our own good time, and that They - the Vassals, are the ones whose throats have been constructed in a way that can

endure the "Pushing Down" operation, without question as to what, when, why, or how long.

Our fourth issue is that which touches upon the tremendous burden of cost inflicted upon society, for which the victim group is held responsible. Several years ago, Elmo Roper, distinguished analyst and statistician attempted to weigh the cost to America of employment discrimination against the Negro minority. From U. S. Census figures on unemployment and under-employment, and in weighing the many factors arising from the creation of a mendicant group of a highly visible racial minority, he came up with the figure of \$30 billion per year as our economic loss. Meantime, sociologists and social psychologists have attempted in many studies to measure the cost of slum housing, that area of the American community reserved for the racial minorities; of the inordinate loss through fire and destruction of property in such areas; of the cost of police protection in communities bearing the blight of slums and slum-bred reactions; of the cost of juvenile and adult delinquency and crime found disproportionately in areas where disillusionment and discouragement prevail; of the cost of court processes and institutional maintenance of those out of step with society - - of all the normal results of the impact upon otherwise normal people, of the abnormal conditions to which society exposes them. In every examination of these many phenomena which color the social scene, the only justification to be found for the many types of discrimination creating these conditions, is the myth of racial inferiority.

Twenty years ago, even less, this myth was widely accepted in a world whose economy was based to a large degree upon an existing colonial system which provided a considerable part of the raw materials to northern reaches of the Western hemisphere. Today, we are in a world which has violently rejected and eliminated the idea of colonialism and its exploitation of half the peoples of the world, and the peoples of that half of the world which for centuries had been the initial victims of a color-caste system, are now in position to shape the destiny of the white world, which in turn has divided itself along the so-called democratic-totalitarian line of separation with its inevitable social, economic, political and military competition for leadership.

Under existing circumstances, the verbal expressions of our political and business leaders fall upon deaf ears. What the world of dark skins notes today, are the performances which indicate much more clearly what are the real thoughts and beliefs of those who would seek their allegiance. The unctious public statement of a political leader have little or no meaning when that person by his actions gives sanction to extra-legal disfranchisement of his Negro constituents, and ignores their pleas for recognition in the affairs of state. The signed agreement of a corporation executive, giving lip-service to Fair Employment practices, is but a meaningless scrap of paper when a Negro worker can rise no higher than janitor or unskilled worker in his plant. The pious platitudes of the educator and the religious leader are worse than silence when in all private and official actions there is evident avoidance of the issues of segregation in neighborhood, school and church, and of second class status in their communities of all persons of color. What they do, speaks so loudly that what they say cannot be heard. Whether or not we like it, this voice reflecting our actions, is that one heard ringing in the corridors of the earth, and is that one which influences the rest of the world in painting its image of a freedom-loving America, which reserves its freedom only for certain kind of people. Thus, those serious-minded Americans who sincerely believe in the principle of brotherhood, find themselves handicapped in attempting to speak Peace, when in reality their voices are drowned out by the roar

of the mob on the campus of the University of Alabama; by the commotion raised by high-pressure fire hose and police dogs in Birmingham; by the impassioned oratory of our Wallaces, "Bull" Connors' and Perez's; and by the unbelievable volume of silence of millions of educational, religious, political, business and labor leaders in this great, free country, who fear to speak or act in the interest of democracy. Yes, the international implications of our domestic race-relations problem are broad and deep and terribly significant.

With these five different facets of one problem serving as a framework for our discussion, let us examine the human relations climate in which we find ourselves today in the American community. For instance, many people are bewildered by the so-called "sudden" bursting out of impatience and of a spirit of rebellion among American Negroes. The simplest, easiest explanation, of course, is one that makes some one unpopular force responsible for the whole mess. What better scapegoat to suggest than international Communism. The fact that the worst defeat suffered by Communism in its drive toward world domination, was its failure to enlist the American Negro more than a generation ago, is still lost upon those who neither recognize this fact nor wish to find the real causes behind today's ferment. So, these dullards will insist that only Communists would know how to make the Negro aware of his unhappy plight. Then, there are the others who have just learned that there is such a sect as the Black Muslims; Selah! All Negroes are becoming Black Muslims so the white world must talk of violence with acts of violence - the only way white people have known how to keep black slaves and colonials in subjection.

The more difficult thing to understand is that the impatience expressed so dramatically today has been part of the Negro character for many generations. To achieve this understanding calls for some knowledge of the Negro's experience in America; of his reliance upon other-worldly religious belief during his period of illiteracy; of his hunger for and realization of the benefits of education; of his acquisition and use of skills as the craftsman and builder in the Old South and of subsequent frustration through withdrawal of opportunity for their use; of all the things which become the saga of a people adjusting to a new world and new culture while experiencing the bewilderment of being forcibly deprived of all the culture, religious belief, moral code, social controls which had functioned effectively in their free, natural existence. To achieve this understanding also calls for the acceptance of a fact of life difficult for the white man to accept, namely, that the white man has used his "word" so freely and carelessly, so dishonestly and insincerely, that his word today has little meaning to his colored fellow American. The one hopeful thing is that the American Negro, of all the breeds of Americans, strongly and deeply believes in the democratic institutions of this contradictory white world; so deeply that he will risk his entire destiny upon the integrity of the American system of education, of free competition, of equality before the law. Even here, however, he knows that safeguards and remedial action are in constant demand.

Such a state of mind has grown out of long experience with hardship and pain. In the many and varied approaches to hopeful solutions to his problem, the Negro has employed patience beyond measure; yet, today, he is constantly being urged to "be patient", these urgings coming from the most impatient people in an impatient world - American white men. He has employed persuasion, from the primitive and ironically successful method of the "Uncle Tom" wheedling approach on an individual plane; through the "chosen leader" form of conciliatory special pleading; by way of the professional Urban League "civic conscience" appeal; and to the more recent bargaining conference attempt at communication. All of these have exposed one

thing - the intent of the white man in American business, political, religious, social life, to yield nothing he is not forced to yield, either in terms of material things through control of employment or in terms of social and political control of every facet of community life. Communication, the intelligent means through which man find ways through their dilemmas, has not been and is not now operating across our racial lines. Persuasion therefore, which must have free channels of communication open in both directions and on a level of mutuality of dignity, has been inoperative as a means toward solution of our racial problem. You just can't persuade anyone who will not listen, who entertains no respect for you or your cause, who has decided in advance not to yield to your pleas. The American Negro has 350 years of experience chalked up in arriving at these conclusions.

The first significant thing about today's racial ferment is that it is the direct result of an identifiable sequence in the development of the pattern of American Race relations. One of the first observable manifestations was the complete rejection by Negro masses today, even the illiterate and ostensibly indifferent masses, of the Booker Washington-Robert Moton type of conciliatory leadership which performed well in its extremely brief period in history. There are far too many whites who are not yet aware of the early demise of this brand of leadership in the Negro world; far too many who are bewildered, disappointed and irritated because their quest for this kind of spokesmanship in the Negro world is not bringing comfortable results.

A second significant trend has been a sorrowful deferment by a large part of these same masses of the Negro world, of the social service plans of operation as practiced by the Urban League for more than half a century. However effective may be the League in its scientific, realistic efforts to accelerate the urbanization of the Negro migrant from the rural south, these efforts are seen by many of the impatient ones as too slow, too uncertain, too dependent upon the good will and magnanimity of the power structure of the white world.

A third significant development has been the shifting status of the 53 year old NAACP. Relying almost exclusively as it has during these years, upon the action of legislatures and courts, in the fashioning and interpreting of Law as a tool of defense, the NAACP began to lose favor with the Negro masses as more militant spokesmen surged to the front. This apparent decline was sharply limited both in time and in the number of persons affected, because the reviving confidence in the organization has brought it to heights in membership and financial aid, never before experienced. This upward swing followed the adoption by the NAACP of more militant, consistent support of the civil rights and civil liberties of the more militant demonstrators on the popular pressure front, as well as a stepping up of its regular task of testing the strength and validity of laws which purport to defend the rights of American citizens.

The fourth very significant development has been the emergence of the American Negro student, supported very actively by a considerable body of American white students, who together have become the vanguard of the nation-wide protest movement. This has provided a sharp break with American social history. It has been a puzzling fact of history that the American college student has differed from his counterparts in other parts of the world, in his failure to be identified with social, economic and political causes in an active way. In all parts of the world, revolt against distasteful features of government or economic controls, has been led by students, whose intellectual awareness and high spirits have brought them into the arena where protest is registered. Not so with the American student. If he is aware, he either is indifferent or is content to register this awareness in

forum debate or television dialogue programs. It has remained for that American college student from whom we may have expected least, and for whom the pain of immediate and drastic reprisal was more certain, the Negro student, to lead the way in constructive, militant expression of dissatisfaction with the status quo. And, it is these students of today who are to be the adult leaders of tomorrow!

But "Why" the question is asked; "why have they chosen lunch counters and bus lines as their objectives, rather than more important issues?" Or, "Why do they concentrate on school desegregation rather than on better Negro schools, or on jobs or on voting rights?" Actually, where does one attempt to break through the circumference of a vicious circle, where each area of concern is linked directly and inseparably with the other. Which of these many areas of concern is more important than the other in one's quest for simple human dignity, for freedom from insult and humiliation, or with the desire to undergird, to strengthen and deepen one's own flagging self-respect? In which of these areas of concern can we see any greater sign of relaxation than in the other; where there seems to be some indication that the majority community is going to be more considerate and more yielding than in the other? Of what value is the ballot when granted to uneducated masses whose hope for securing education is reduced to the lowest level of expectation; or how effective is a local demand for educational equality that must be made upon politicians who do not need your vote to perpetuate themselves in office? How far does one get in demands for better job opportunity without some government authority to back up that demand, and sufficient training in your population to fill the jobs that may be opened by such demands? Just where does one start in this kind of crusade: with youth who sees no hope; with employers who resent your intrusions and demands; with legislatures which move only when sufficient voting power is indicated as favorable to the crusade? How does one select out of this intricate maze, the one simple path to travel that will be acceptable to the already defensive and guilty majority groups?

Just by way of example, let's attempt to measure one very important facet of our race relations' problem - a facet that can be measured statistically, both in terms of opportunities that have been made available, and the degree to which the Negro has profited from them. If a scholar from Mars were to visit our planet and find it to his interest to consider our racial history, he would arrive at the inescapable conclusion that to the sons and daughters of slaves belonged the claim to greatest investment in facilities, up-to-date text-books, teaching staffs of highest proficiency, and superior methods of making education interesting to those citizens who had so very much catching up to do. He would be shocked and puzzled by finding in public records that exactly the opposite is true, and that this great deficiency has been hidden behind the misleading label of "separate but equal". Statistically, the facts are these, as reported in statistics assembled by the U.S. Department of Education almost a score of years ago.

Investment in school properties in the years indicated, disclosed the amount per child invested by the states mentioned:

1930 - 31: New Jersey \$206, Alabama \$118, Virginia \$112, Arkansas \$78 - but in these latter states where schools were separated by race, investments in school properties for Negroes were respectively \$21, \$35 and \$27.

Negro children who were enrolled in these schools in that year now represent 75% to 90% of parents of high school youth in northern cities.

Then, in 1943 - 44 New Jersey had invested \$580 per child while in the 12 southern states \$250 was the average. For Negroes in these 12 states the sum of \$70 was considered sufficient.

Those who were children in school in those states then are now parents of 75% to 90% of the elementary school children in our northern industrial communities today.

Operating expenses per child per year provide another dimension from which we see that in 1943 - 44 New Jersey spent \$198, but in the 12 Southern states an average of \$85 per year per white child was spent and \$45 per year per Negro child sufficed.

Despite these glaring deficiencies and inadequacies, from the section of America from which have come nearly 3/4 of the parents of this generation, Negro youth's hunger for higher education is reflected in a comparison with world-wide figures compiled by United Nations in 1951.

United States	-	11,780 per million population
Canada	-	4,927
Japan	-	4,639
Sweden	-	2,390
Great Britain	-	2,086

American Negro students that same year were approximately 90,000 in a 15 million population, or a rate of 6000 - a higher rate than could be found among any of the other peoples of the world.

If it were possible to produce statistically the story of the long, hard fight the Negro has made to secure his right of franchise, from his first attempts in Reconstruction Days, through the first U. S. Supreme Court test when Negroes were permitted for the first time to participate in the Oklahoma Democratic primaries, right up to the present efforts of the U. S. Department of Justice to obtain voting rights for Negro citizens in Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi, we would be equally impressed. If it were possible to produce in statistics something of the pain, anguish, anger, fury which assails a normal human being who finds it impossible to get food in public restaurants when hungry, drink and comfort in places of public accommodation when in need, the right to buy shelter when away from his own home, with constant exposure to insult, humiliation and even physical mistreatment for even daring to seek such services, it would give some meaning to the emotional quality of the Negro's voice of protest these days. If the art of communication were such that through the use of words one could be caused to feel the emptiness, the disillusionment, the discouragement and hopelessness which assails the Negro when his patient pleading for a decent break, for just half a chance, is brushed aside carelessly and thoughtlessly by those who are in position to rectify the condition, there would be no need for demonstrations in order to shock a nation into a state of awareness.

This, then, is the substance from which the spirit of the present day revolution has been distilled. Under the circumstances, it is a proper question to ask - what is there left to do? Better still, what would you do, if these were the daily experiences to which you as one person were exposed.

The white man of the western world - and of the eastern for that matter - has been the historical advocate of violence as a means of changing the order of things. From the red-blooded American gentleman who believes that a bust in the jaw is the

one honorable way to repay an insult, to the almost universal acceptance of the principle that war is the only way to settle an international grievance, we who have our roots in western culture have been bred in the school of violence. Is it not of great significance that the organized protest raised by twenty millions of Negroes in the U. S. has been in the form of non-violent demonstration, even in the face of extreme provocation?

But all protest has not been an organized expression. Individuals whose personal intellectual and emotional equipment has provided a low boiling point, have been among the tens of thousands of persons whom we class as delinquents or criminals. Without considering at all the conditions under which such persons have lived, the experiences with indignity they may have endured, the provocation to which they may have responded, they are classed simply as the criminals of our society, and as such, are the persons to whom law enforcement officials must of necessity give their attention.

When the number of such persons in a community can be identified simply by race, or nationality, or some other highly visible tag, the most common result is that the racial tag becomes attached to the criminal tag, and the two identities become one. The inevitable result of this constantly recurring chain of circumstance is that the law enforcement officials and the minority group leadership of a community find themselves at the opposite ends of the pole, with little or no communication with which to repair the damage that rumor and suspicion can cause, and they begin viewing each other as natural enemies. I am bold enough to say that there is not a major community in the United States in which this state of affairs does not exist.

The spirit of revolt in the Negro community, while seeming at the moment to be in decline, is something with which the American community will have to cope for some time to come, measured in time almost entirely by the degree to which the majority community begins to recognize the validity of the claims of the Negro citizen and makes the necessary adjustments with which to meet the many demands. During the course of this social phenomenon, whether or not we wish to recognize it as a revolution, the cultural stature of the community will be indicated by the degree of understanding exhibited by law enforcement officers as they perform their not always pleasant duties. If non-violence is met with non-violence; if law violation by demonstrators is met with firm but just handling by the police; if violent acts of anti-Negro demonstrators are handled with speed, firmness and required vigor; in other words, if police act with professional efficiency and integrity, the reputation of the community need never be in jeopardy.

For any of us to assume that police are some kind of super-men who are not subject to the same suspicions, beliefs, opinions and prejudices as are found among businessmen, labor leaders, clergymen or teachers would be unrealistic. It is true that the community generally resorts to one or the other of two extremes; namely, considering its police as the super-efficient robots who can endure any physical discomfort or danger without signs of fear, meet any crisis with the complete answer as to how to cope with it, and to do all the distasteful duties which no one else in the community wishes to do, and to do all these things without costing the taxpayer too much money. The other image is that of the indolent, irresponsible and graft-taking loafer who is never where he is wanted at the moment, but who is always on hand to humiliate the honorable citizen for what the citizen considers to have been a minor traffic violation. We who have worked closely with police departments over the years, know that neither of these distorted images is true nor could be true; but that the community does place upon the shoulders of police some of the most responsible duties in maintaining peace and tranquillity in a community

where most other people become very thoughtless and careless about their own responsibilities in these areas.

This awareness, when viewed from the position which has been the subject of this discussion, causes us to recognize that if the police ever are to have an opportunity to develop professional acumen and efficiency in the department's most difficult area of operation, it will be only because the training experience will give ample opportunity to explore the facts. It seems to me to be the most logical procedure, that if a particular part of the community produces a disproportionate amount of crime and delinquency, it is incumbent upon all of us to study the conditions which produce this phenomenon. To do less, certainly is not professional; to ignore the logic of this procedure certainly does not lead to efficiency.

This then is what lies behind the efforts of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, which for a number of years has been working diligently in every part of the country for the development of Police and Community Relations Institutes, Seminars and training courses; for veteran command and supervisory officers, for in-service experience of patrolmen, and as part of the training of rookies coming into police work.

The picture of law enforcement in minority group communities has not been a pleasant one. We have seen repeatedly the beginning and the perpetuating of a vicious cycle where minority group expressions such as we have just reviewed, have been misread and misinterpreted by police officials, whose summary and oftentimes impatient treatment of the group members has deepened and broadened their suspicions, fear and hostility; this in turn, bringing even sterner police measures. Intelligence, reason, training and logic are not exhibited in such situations. Confidence is the element so sadly needed if the cycle ever is to be reversed, and a practical and effective law enforcement procedure be employed. And, be assured, that confidence cannot be established, nor can it prevail, where there is not communication. I mean, by communication, the free, honest and thoughtful exchange between peers; the intelligent means whereby the leadership elements of a community, may regularly test their opinion, thoughts and actions between groups who differ in outlook; the civilized method of going to the source of authentic information and knowledge concerning our fellowmen.

It is we who have the leadership responsibility to seek the establishment of confidence, and the specialists' knowledge with which to meet the challenge. This specialists' knowledge must be a demonstrated, tested knowledge, rather than the beliefs and opinions which come through rumor and the blind acceptance of ill-founded customs and practices. The general public is constantly reminded that ignorance of the law is no excuse, when the law enforcement officer apprehends a naive violator. With equal emphasis it may be said, with respect to the statistical predictability of human reaction, that ignorance of these laws of human behavior is no excuse for the officer who would wish to achieve professional status.

Law enforcement procedures in today's tense world, require a knowledge and a sensitivity that permit a feeling of the community pulse; that bestow the ability to note signs of majority and minority group acts of aggression which are sure to invite reprisal; that provide an awareness of minority group motivations and temper. It is this kind of sensitivity that makes it possible for police to assess the meaning of small and isolated incidents which indicate underlying tensions, any one of which may trigger the big explosion. In truth, broader human relations understanding is an assurance of more effective law enforcement in the American community.

If our understanding is real, we will recognize that minority group rebellion will not subside through the process of sermonizing; that full intergroup cooperation cannot be a transitory and one-way action; that people in the mass cannot be expected to function on levels higher than those to which society consigns them; and that every American who presumes to sit in judgment upon whole groups of people, and to limit their participation on affairs of the Nation, creates costly and painful problems for all of us.

by

Harold A. Lett, Consultant
National Program Development
National Conference of Christians and Jews
43 West 57th Street
New York 19, New York

HAL/me